leave aside these technical depths to consider the broader implications of
these arguments. As in *Breaking with Athens*, Colmo wants to challenge Leo
Strauss's interpretation of Alfarabi's *Philosophy of Plato*. Colmo is convinced
that Alfarabi has much more practical aims than did Plato. He takes this
opposition so far that he denies Strauss's simple claim that knowing that
philosophy is the right way of life is not itself part of "philosophy
proper"—the inquiry into happiness is a part of political philosophy (10,
91–92, 227, 235). Colmo wants philosophy's proper object to be action.
Unfortunately, we can't always get what we want.

–Joshua Parens
*University of Dallas, Irving, Texas, USA*

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Amar Sohal: *The Muslim Secular: Parity and the Politics of India's Partition*. (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. x, 328.)

Amar Sohal's *The Muslim Secular* makes a powerful intervention in Indian
political thought, especially in the body of literature known as Indian
secularism. The dominant conception of Indian secularism, in contrast to
its European counterparts, holds that religion continues to operate in the pub-
lic sphere and the state maintains a "principled distance" from the various
religions operating in the public domain. This understanding, while plausible
in many ways, views secularism through a certain lens that *The Muslim
Secular* contests. Two aspects of Indian secularism that Sohal particularly
problematizes are its state-centricity and the state's establishing and sustain-
ing of a dichotomy between religious majorities and minorities to manage
religions in public life. Sohal does so by reconstructing Maulana Abul
Kalam Azad (1888–1958), Sheikh Abdullah (1905–1982), and Abdul Ghaffar
Khan (1890–1988) as political thinkers, the scholars who are otherwise read
as Muslim political actors. These Muslim scholars who resisted the Pakistan
demand and remained with the Indian Congress, Sohal argues, while resist-
ing Indian Partition for a united India, imagined a secularism engendered
within the social interactions of religious communities.

Sohal implies that these scholars defy the common supposition that an irrec-
oncilable Hindu-Muslim rivalry already exists in the public sphere and the state
must intervene to manage the conflict. For Sohal, these scholars rather argue
that a distinct secularism has evolved with an inseparable, organic blending
of Hindu and Muslim cultures from medieval and early modern India. In
other words, an organic cultural blending produced a secular cultural unity
in the social realm. Sohal views secularism as a culture by making a distinction

between religious faith and culture. He assumes that cultures are blended in the public interactions among communities whereas their faiths remain separate from it, insisting that Hinduism and Islam function autonomously beyond the shared cultural realm in the public sphere.

How could faith be separated from culture while the Indian public sphere is often marred with faith-inspired tensions and violence? The dividing line between faith and culture, though assumed, remains ambiguous in Sohal's illustration. Sohal claims that religious communities recognize the distinction of other faiths, while producing common secular culture "through recognizing a mutual *knowledge* of each other's parables, myths, and dogmas, rather than any common *faith*" (42). In the process of assimilation and interactions, the blending that Muslim and Hindu cultures historically went through created a "new synthesis" fusing cultures so effectively that "it was no longer possible to separate them without destroying the integrity of modern culture in India altogether" (37). Was this inseparable cultural integrity supported by empirical evidence, or was it a product of imagination by Muslim scholars in their respective political conditions? It seems Sohal argues for the latter, stating that regardless of their existence, Muslim scholars invented it to advocate their argument for an equal share of united secular nationality in the political conditions of Indian partition. This argument, however, merits further clarity, supported by a greater body of evidence.

Although the Muslim League leadership in the context of precarious politics of partition denied a cultural unity in India and prioritized religious difference over unity, these congress member Muslim scholars argued for a cultural unity for a secular Indian state. These scholars' thought on cultural unity, however, is different from the Hindu congress leaders' idea that "India was endowed with 'a faculty of assimilation,'" where new groups like Muslims had successfully merged (48). Sohal contends that the Muslim leaders instead resist the dominant congress thought that one dominant Hindu culture takes the central stage of Indian cultural life and other religious cultures coming from outside merely merge with it, thereby eternally remaining in the periphery of the main cultural current. For Sohal, these scholars rather argue that Muslim culture, having an organic assimilation with the Hindu and other cultures in India, developed a united secular culture in medieval and early modern India, where cultures became inseparable from each other and all cultures, regardless of their time of inclusion or the number of their advocates, became the candidates for an equal share of modern Indian culture. Sohal recovers and defends the sovereign status of congress Muslim thinkers' distinct ideas that were ignored due to their submersion beneath the prevalent ideas of the congress Hindu leaders. In doing so, he corrects the widespread misconception that Muslim leaders were mere imitators of the ideas and actions of their Hindu counterparts.

The congress Muslim scholars' argument for equal share in Indian culture, or broadly, the making of secular Indian nationality, does not depend on Hindu-Muslim, majority and minority, demography-oriented reasonings. Sohal argues

that they tend to undo the very categories of majority and minority by reconceptualizing parity in a distinct sense. They redefined parity claiming that parity lies between "Hindus and Muslims in terms of, not their unequal numbers, but of their equal values" (32). They argued that "parity is able to positivize, at once, both the status of Hindus and Muslims as India's co-founders, and their religious autonomies" (32). It conveys, according to Sohal, "two-pronged" notions of commonality and distinction, which means the communities were alike in many ways but not identical. For Sohal, Muslim seculars' understanding of parity is different from the equality claim of communities, which has the potential to erode differences through the process of national assimilation. Against this vision, these scholars argued for equality-as-parity, which is establishing equality or giving equal share of communities in national building by keeping their particularities unharmed.

By reconstructing equality as parity and conceptualizing secularism as culture, these Muslim scholars refused to give up their equal share of a united India. Sohal claims that their Hindu colleagues from the Indian Congress, like Nehru and Gandhi, failed to advance such an argument for Muslims to claim an equal share in the making of India. For Sohal, Nehru's argument for a secular Indian nation and state still implicitly prioritizes Hindu civilization while overemphasizing ancient Indian civilization. Gandhi's secular nationalism imagined Hindu-Muslim relations in fraternal terms that tend to replace the betrayal of religious communities with the vernacular idea of tolerance and love for religious others. Although like Gandhi these three scholars conceived of secularism in principally social terms and focused more on the present than the past, they deviate from Gandhi's idea of fraternity that concentrates "not on what Indians shared, but on what made Hindus and Muslims different" (29). While Gandhi sought to substitute an explosive Hindu-Muslim relation by a "disinterested friendship" by tolerating and loving relations with others, for these Muslim seculars that was inadequate. They sought to uncover the shared culture that has historically developed, one in which people do not need to exert effort to tolerate and love others; a shared culture of ownership and living together already exists in the social domain.

Sohal recovers this lost thought of Muslim seculars offering a fresh perspective of secular India from the Indian Muslim standpoint that "politically existed but was historiographically undermined" within the predominant debates of India's Hindu or Dalit scholars' thoughts. *The Muslim Secular* revises the conventional supposition that Muslim seculars in Indian Congress were merely derivative of their Hindu colleagues' thoughts and actions, by assessing their thought in their own terms. Written with elegance and meticulous research, the book advances a new perspective of secularism that organically develops through the assimilation of religious cultures into the social sphere—learning to recognize and tolerate other religious particularities—going beyond the argument for a state-managed secularism.

The book, with an introduction and conclusion, is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters center on the ideas and actions of Maulana Abul

Kalam Azad and his acolytes to offer a conceptual and historiographical account of how the Muslim inherits and owns Indian culture and nationality, contributing to the emergence of a distinct Indian secularism. The third and fourth chapters, respectively, examine the thoughts and actions of Sheikh Abdullah and Abdul Ghaffar Khan. These chapters demonstrate that although these scholars accentuate more of their regional politics—Kashmiri politics for the former and the politics of Pashtun for the latter—they refused to give up their claim for India, to "accept anything less than the equal value for Hindus and Muslims to their shared nation" (33).

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–Md Mizanur Rahman
*University of California, Santa Cruz, California, USA*

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John Claiborne Isbell: *Staël, Romanticism and Revolution: The Life and Times of the First European*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi, 289.)

Germaine de Staël's initial foray into publication is sometimes presented as partly involuntary. While it was something of a literary conceit to claim that your occasional verse had been stolen from your portfolio or that well-meaning friends had insisted you should allow the wider world to read your prose, circumstantial evidence suggests that the author was not at first intent on her 1788 *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* being circulated widely. A complicated network of pirate versions but also ones she tolerated marked her entry into what John Claiborne Isbell rightly terms "a public career against which she protested, if she did not fight" (13). He affirms this in a 1999 article, originally published in French (but given here in English), which concludes with a full bibliographical description of sixteen duly analyzed editions. Like the earlier version of this one, many excellent articles appear in edited volumes, Festschrifts, or journals with a limited readership. It is in many ways a service to the profession, when they display some form of thematic unity, to bring such texts together in a single volume (and in one language). Despite what one might be led to expect, such an initiative is more or less exactly what lies at the core of John Claiborne Isbell's *Staël, Romanticism and Revolution: The Life and Times of the First European*, although it appears in a series which has as its purported aim "to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies." The overarching title, with its unexpected ordering of the two nouns (French Romanticism, in chronological terms, is generally considered to be post- rather than prerevolutionary), suggests a narrative which is replaced here by the largely chronological ordering of the component parts.